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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: RIYADH RECORD: JUNE 30-JULY 7 2006

REF: A. A) RIYADH 5167  
[B. B\) RIYADH 5450](#)  
[C. C\) BEIRUT 2323.](#)

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller  
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: Majlis al-Shoura rejects an appeal to revoke on the religious police funding proposal, while at the same time rejecting a proposal for them to wear publicly-identifiable uniforms. Six women were added as part-time consultants on women's issues to the Shoura Council, bringing the total of women consultants to nine. The Director General for the Commission of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice had his service extended for four years. Youth summer programs will include courses on dialogue and tolerance for the first time. Prominent female artist holds art exhibition in Riyadh. Egyptian President Husni Mubarak met with King Abdullah in Jeddah. Crown Prince Sultan will be visiting France next week to discuss military sales. END SUMMARY.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM:  
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[1](#)2. (S) Majlis al-Shoura Continues Rolling Out Advisory Opinions: Immediately following the Shoura Council's rejection of additional funding for the religious police (a.k.a. 'Mutaawa'), they rejected a proposal requiring the Mutaawa from wearing uniforms to clearly identify themselves to the public. This advisory opinion, won only by a slight majority, shows the wavering stance that the Council takes on the Mutaawa. Its dismissal of repeated claims of abuse and impersonation, and therefore the need for uniforms, is seemingly contrary to the Council's previous declaration of the need for greater accountability (Ref A). Additionally, the Mutaawa lost an appeal to revoke on the earlier rejected proposals for additional funding proposed by the Shoura Council's subcommittee for Islamic Judicial and Human Rights Affairs. The Shoura Council endorsed a law to name the violators of the Kingdom's residency laws, both citizens and non-citizens alike, in the local newspapers, in an effort to curb the problem of overstayers. This action was approved by an overwhelming majority and shows their support for items of general popular concern. They also publicly condemned Israel's actions in Gaza Strip and West Bank, calling on regional and international Parliaments to confront the "injustice inflicted upon the unarmed Palestinian people."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Women Consultants Join the Majlis al-Shoura: The Shoura Council selected six women to join the three current part-time consultants as advisors, mostly on women's issues. Although there was no proclamation made on the inclusion of women as full time members of the Council, this was the first addition of women consultants in over a year and demonstrates their increased understanding of the importance of including

women in politics.

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COMMISSION OF PROMOTION OF VIRTUE AND PREVENTION OF VICE:  
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14. (C) The service of the Director General of the Commission of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (a.k.a. 'Mutaawa'), Sheikh Ibrahim bin Abdullah al-Ghaith, has been extended by royal decree for four more years at the rank of Minister. This extension comes as a surprise, since a majority of the complaints received by the National Human Rights Commission are precipitated by Mutaawa actions. Pushback to King Abdullah's reforms tend to originate from the Mutaawa members and their followers.

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YOUTH AND CULTURE:  
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15. (C) Youth Summer Camps to Promote Dialogue: Annually the Ministry of Education hosts summer programs for thousands of Saudi youth; although these programs typically involve sporting activities and religious courses, there has been reporting in the past suggesting that they are breeding grounds for extremism. These claims were raised in the previous National Dialogue Center Forum, and as a result, the Ministry is offering, for the first time in these summer programs, two-day courses on dialogue and tolerance with "each other and outsiders, including other Arabs, non-Arab Muslims, non-Muslims and Westerners." In preparation for these new courses, 250 counselors were trained on this issue. Although this move is a positive response to the National Dialogue, there are other reports that there will be a koranic studies summer camp, called "Al-Aqsa", which will bring more than twenty Israeli Arab children from another summer camp in Jerusalem to Mecca and Medina for a fifteen-day course on the Koran and Islam. This camp specifically is reported to be used by more fundamentalist sheikhs to teach about the importance of strengthening ties between Israeli Arabs and the rest of the Arab world.

16. (U) Female Saudi Artist Holds Art Exhibition in Riyadh: Dr. Nada Abdul Rahim Farhat held a three-day art exhibition in Riyadh, focusing on the Kingdom's desert life. Raised in New Mexico, but living in Saudi Arabia since 1994, Dr. Nada states that she uses her art to convey "a message of peace to the world, while calling on the West to change their perception about the Arab world." As most art exhibitions are held outside of the capital city, the Riyadh venue, particularly for a female artist, was an unusual event.

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VIP VISITS TO THE KINGDOM:  
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17. (U) Egyptian President Husni Mubarak met with King Abdullah in Jeddah on July 3. Their talks focused on the recent developments in the Palestinian territories, with particular attention paid to Israel's threats to Gaza, as well as the security situation in Iraq. They noted that the situation in the territories is "very serious" and that coordinated efforts among Arab leaders are needed. Mubarak was warmly received by the King, who held for Mubarak a special luncheon party and personally accompanied him to the airport.

18. (U) King Abdullah also met the Secretary General for the Organization of Islamic Conference, Professor Akmaluddin Ihsanuglu, on July 3, Yemeni Interior Minister, Dr. Rashad al-Ulaimi, on July 2, and the Leader of Lebanon's Progressive Socialist Party, Walid Junblatt, on July 4 (Ref C).

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UPCOMING SENIOR SAG VISIT TO FRANCE:  
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19. (S/NF) Crown Prince Sultan to Visit France: Crown Prince

Sultan, who is also the Minister of Defense and Aviation, reportedly plans to visit France on July 20 to discuss military sales. Embassy contacts allege that the French are resorting to increasingly aggressive tactics to promote defense sales to the SAG, including Airbus refueling tankers, the Rafael fighter jet, helicopters, frigates and submarines.

Embassy contacts report that the SAG may soon conclude a deal to purchase three Airbus A-330 refueling tankers, rather than four Boeing 767 tankers (Ref B).

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